



*MESSAGE FROM YOUR FLOODPLAIN MANAGER
LONDON K. SMITH, CBO., CFM.*

In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina and the storms that have affected our area, I have received many questions and requests for information related to flood damage. Specific requests involve the City of Orange Beach Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance, the National Flood Insurance Program, Flood Mitigation, Increased Cost of Compliance and insurance claim related information. I hope that this article will help answer some of the frequently asked questions and provide some resources for additional information.

If you live in **Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA)** and/or are subject to coastal flooding caused by storm surge, you need to be aware of procedures related to flood preparedness. If you do not have flood insurance, contact your insurance agent. **HOMEOWNERS POLICIES DO NOT COVER DAMAGE FROM FLOODS.** Because the City of Orange participates in the **National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)** you can purchase flood insurance, even if your property lies within a SFHA and even if your property has flooded previously. Mandatory purchase of flood insurance is a condition of a federally backed mortgage.

It is important for people to have a basic understanding of the National Flood Insurance Program and how it benefits the citizens of Orange Beach. Up until 1968, Federal actions related to flooding were primarily responses to significant events that resulted in using structural measures to control flooding. Despite the billions of dollars in Federal investments in structural flood-control projects, the losses to life and property and the amount of assistance to disaster victims from floods continued to increase. Through legislation the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 was passed which created the NFIP.

In addition to providing flood insurance and reducing flood damages through floodplain management regulations, the NFIP identifies and maps the Nation's floodplains. It is important for property owners to be aware of their floodplain designation. The latest flood maps are maintained by the City of Orange Beach Community Development Department office located at 4101 Orange Beach Blvd. Community Development staff can provide you with the following information: 1) Whether your property is within the SFHA, 2) NFIP community number, 3) NFIP Flood Insurance Rate Map panel number, suffix, index date, base flood elevation, the elevation datum used and 4) elevation or floodproofing requirements for your particular building.

When the NFIP was created, the U.S. Congress recognized that insurance for "existing buildings" constructed before a community joined the Program would be prohibitively expensive if the premiums were not subsidized by the Federal Government. Early in the Program's history, the Federal Government found that providing subsidized flood insurance for existing buildings was not a sufficient incentive for communities to voluntarily join the NFIP nor for individuals to purchase flood insurance. Tropical Storm Agnes in 1972, which caused extensive riverine flooding along the east coast, proved that few property owners in identified floodplains were insured. As a result, Congress passed the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973. The 1973 Act prohibits Federal agencies from providing financial assistance for acquisition or construction of buildings and certain disaster assistance in the floodplains in any community that did not participate in the NFIP by July 1, 1975, or within 1 year of being identified as flood-prone.

The City of Orange Beach has participated in the program since its incorporation in 1984. There are three basic components of the Program – identifying and mapping flood-prone communities, the requirement that communities adopt and enforce floodplain management regulations, and the provision of flood insurance. The floodplain management regulations for the City of Orange Beach are found in the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance. This document is available for review at the Orange Beach Public Library. The Ordinance establishes the minimum criteria that must be met in order to undertake any development within the special flood hazard area. **The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** monitors communities to ensure that they have adopted an ordinance that meets or exceeds the minimum NFIP floodplain management criteria and to ensure that they are effectively enforcing their ordinance.

Several of the City of Orange Beach's efforts to reduce losses from flooding require your cooperation and assistance. **BE FLOOD AWARE** – Do not dump or throw anything into ditches or drainage easements, this is a violation of the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance. Even grass clippings and branches can accumulate and restrict flow in drainage ditches. If a ditch or easement is on your property, please do your part to keep the banks clear of debris. The City has a ditch maintenance program a can help remove major blockages such as downed trees. If you see dumping or debris in ditches or easements, call the City of Orange Beach Public Works Department at (251) 974-5617.

In addition to the NFIP the City of Orange Beach also participates in the **Community Rating System (CRS)**. The three goals of the CRS, simply stated are to 1) Reduce flood losses, 2) Facilitate accurate insurance rating and 3) Promote the awareness of flood insurance. The Community Rating System provides discounts on flood insurance premiums in those communities that establish floodplain management programs that go beyond NFIP minimum requirements. The CRS is a voluntary program that began implementation in the fall of 1990. Under the CRS, communities receive credit for more restrictive regulations, acquisition, relocation, or floodproofing of flood-prone buildings, preservation of open space, and other measures that reduce flood damages or protect the natural resources and functions of floodplains. The City of Orange Beach currently receives a ten percent (10%) reduction in rates due to our CRS rating.

If your home or business is damaged by a flood, you may be required to meet certain building requirements in your community to reduce future flood damage before you repair or rebuild. There are several ways to protect a building from flood damage. The most common method is elevation; this involves lifting your structure to the required elevation for your zone. To help you cover the costs of meeting those requirements, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) includes **Increased Cost of Compliance (ICC)** coverage for all new and renewed Standard Flood Insurance Policies. Flood insurance policyholders in high-risk areas, also known as special flood hazard areas, can get up to \$30,000 to help pay the costs to bring their home or business into compliance with their community's floodplain ordinance.

There are four options you can take to comply with your community's floodplain management ordinance and help you reduce future flood damage. You may decide which of these options is best for you.

1. **Elevation.** This raises your home or business to or above the flood elevation level adopted by your community.
2. **Relocation.** This moves your home or business out of harm's way.
3. **Demolition.** This tears down and removes flood-damaged buildings.

4. **Floodproofing.** This option is available primarily for non-residential buildings. It involves making a building watertight through a combination of adjustments or additions of features to the building that reduces the potential for flood damage.

You may file a claim for your Increased Cost of Compliance coverage in two instances:

1. If your community determines that your home or business is damaged by flood to the point that repairs will cost 50 percent or more of the building's pre-damage market value. This is called substantial damage.
2. If your community determines that your home or business was damaged by a flood two times in the past 10 years, where the cost of repairing the flood damage, on the average, equaled or exceeded 25 percent of its market value at the time of each flood. This is called repetitive damage. Additionally, there must have been flood insurance claim payments for each of the two flood losses.

FEMA also can assist in the way of grants to help mitigate your property. **Mitigation** is the cornerstone of emergency management. It's the ongoing effort to lessen the impact disasters have on people and property. Mitigation involves keeping homes away from floodplains, creating and enforcing effective building codes to protect property from hurricanes -- and more.

FEMA currently has three mitigation grant programs: the **Hazards Mitigation Grant Program (HGMP)**, the **Pre-Disaster Mitigation program (PDM)**, and the **Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA)** program.

Hazards Mitigation Grant Program (HGMP)

Authorized under Section 404 of the Stafford Act, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provides grants to States and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster declaration. The purpose of the program is to reduce the loss of life and property due to natural disasters and to enable mitigation measures to be implemented during the immediate recovery from a disaster declaration. Individual homeowners and businesses may not apply directly to the program; however a community may apply on their behalf. HMGP funds may be used to fund projects that will reduce or eliminate the losses from future disasters. Projects must provide a long-term solution to a problem, for example, elevation of a home to reduce the risk of flood damages as opposed to buying sandbags and pumps to fight the flood. In addition, a project's potential savings must be more than the cost of implementing the project.

Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program

FMA provides funding to assist States and communities in implementing measures to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of flood damage to buildings, manufactured homes, and other structures insurable under the National Flood Insurance Program. A few examples of eligible FMA projects include: the elevation, acquisition, and relocation of NFIP-insured structures. Funding for the program is provided through the National Flood Insurance Fund, and FMA is funded at \$20 million nationally.

Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program

The Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program provides technical and financial assistance to States and local governments for cost-effective pre-disaster hazard mitigation activities that complement a comprehensive mitigation program, and reduce injuries, loss of life, and damage and destruction of property. FEMA provides grants to States that, in turn, provide sub-grants to local governments for mitigation activities such as planning and the implementation of projects identified through the evaluation of natural hazards.

The City of Orange Beach maintains a warning system operated through the phone system to advise citizens of emergency conditions, evacuation orders or severe weather conditions. This system will automatically dial each resident with pertinent information. Sunny 105.7 FM (WCSN – FM) is the official information station and will provide complete weather and City emergency information.

The City of Orange Beach Community Development Department staff can provide assistance and information when dealing with flood insurance, mitigation and floodplain planning. Information available includes advising and assisting on retrofitting techniques, providing a directory of local information sources and a Floodplain Management Resource Center (located at the Orange Beach Library), providing names of engineers, architects and contractors familiar with flood mitigation and retrofit, and conducting site visits to review flood, drainage or sewer problems and many other flood-related services.

In addition you may visit FEMA's website at www.fema.gov or the NFIP website at www.floodsmart.gov for additional information relating to the NFIP, floodplain management and assistance.

Hopefully this information is beneficial and answers some questions about your community and its involvement in the flood insurance and disaster assistance process. Contact your Community Development Department for additional information at (251) 981-2610.

Sincerely,

Landon K. Smith, CBO, CFM
Floodplain Administrator, CRS Coordinator
City of Orange Beach Community Development Department

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1